

THE PAIN AND CONSEQUENCES OF DRUG ADDICTION

No one suffers more than the addict and their family

By Paul Whiting and Helena Marriott

Drug addiction touches the lives of many, not only the addict and his/her family. There is cost to community and the taxpayer and our government is not doing enough to control access to these drugs.

As we write this, our son Kevin sits in a jail cell accused of multiple break-ins around our community of Boutilier's Point. Some local residents seem pleased about this, as evidenced by the blitz of media attention and the "buzz" of gossip around the area; they have already decided that he is guilty until proven innocent. However, we have also received encouragement and support from others who know Kevin and care about the tragedy we are dealing with. The Kevin we know and love is now an addict controlled by prescription drug abuse; his only goal in life is to feed his habit and eliminate his pain. Our family has lost a son, a brother, a grandson, an uncle, a nephew; and we don't know if we'll ever get him back.

Kevin was a timid, likeable and respected young man who did not smoke or do drugs and, like any young person, drank beer with his friends. He shunned crowds and attention and often seemed to be a troubled young man. He certainly was not a "drug-crazed thief terrorizing the neighborhood" as is being depicted in news articles and at community meetings by those who want their pound of flesh.

If Kevin is found guilty of the charges he faces, we do not make excuses for him and we are sorry for any harm he may have caused anyone who became a victim of any crime he has committed. We would ask that people try to have empathy and understand that Kevin is a victim of his drug abuse and the system that fails those that fall victim to this sickness. He was not born a drug addict. We hope and pray that those who now judge him never suffer the pain and frustration we have as we helplessly and slowly lost our son to drugs.

Many residents of this community may not know of the horrible tragedy in May 1997 when we lost several of our community youth to a boating accident on Big Indian Lake. Kevin was one of the survivors – he heard the calls for help and watched his cousin and best friends drown in the frigid waters on that night. Kevin managed to hold onto the upset boat but was helpless to save any of them. Some may have the strength to deal with such a tragedy; Kevin didn't. He never talked about that night and buried his pain deep inside. We believe that this event changed his life forever.

Several years later, Kevin met a new "friend", a known local drug dealer and career criminal who became his new best buddy. Our attempts to warn him about this person fell on deaf ears; he could not see past this new friendship. This person "understood his pain" and offered him pills to help. He has since moved on leaving Kevin trapped in his hell.

We soon saw the signs of change and tried to intervene but Kevin moved out to live his own life and we had no control over the path he took. Years of frustration followed reaching out for help, in/out of every rehab in the province, hospitals, reaching out to government officials and programs but there is no affordable program that can keep an adult against his will to get the long-term help he needs. Everyone and every system failed him as it does so many others. The battle for control between an addict and drugs is almost always won by the drugs.

Our "picture perfect" community is anything but. Beautiful yes, but many of our people, young and old suffer from alcohol and drug abuse and families have been torn apart by abuse, suicide and poverty. We used to be a community where friends and neighbors would rally around to help a family in crisis rather than condemn in ignorance and use the media to inflict more pain on the victim and his/her family. The price we pay for progress and growth. Kevin has become our poster boy criminal getting more media attention than murderers and child

molesters because some feel the problem in our community will be solved if he is sentenced and put away. This small-minded attitude will benefit no one; there are many others with similar problems that will steal to get what they want or need. Since Kevin has been in jail, we know of two vehicles and an ATV that were stolen in the Bay area – couldn't have been Kevin!

I'm afraid, Mr. Sklapsky that you are very much ignorant of the mind of an addict if you think that an addict on drugs will ever be "afraid of you" (CBC news 10/18/12) – a drug addict is not afraid of anyone or anything and cares only about where the next fix comes from to ease his/her pain. This community should not fear addicts like Kevin but rather be afraid of the failure of a government and society that does not take action to stop the supply of these harmful drugs to our youth. As long as dealers have a supply, our youth are at risk and the sickness of addiction will flourish. Use your "show of force in the Canada way" to lobby government to act against this epidemic rather than focus vigilante attention on one sick person.

Kevin's family will also be in court this week but not to condemn or scare Kevin. We will be there to love and support him in hopes he can get treatment for his sickness so we can have our son back. If he is found guilty and sentenced, then perhaps the government will be forced to give him the help he needs in jail – what a pity they couldn't do more to help him before drug abuse led him on a criminal path.

Pay careful attention to your children and loved ones and recognize the signs of addiction before they become an irreversible sickness. Our hearts go out to anyone fighting a battle against addiction and we hope everyone will use their energy not to judge those that have succumbed but to lobby government to do something NOW to stop this drug epidemic. Our government needs to do more to control these dangerous drugs and put programs in place to help those afflicted before any more of our children and grandchildren become victims with nowhere to go for help. .